

Academic Quality in DoD Civilian Educational Institutions

DoD Chancellor's Office Facilitates Development of Academic Standards, Metrics, Quality Levels for Metrics of Excellence Project (MEP)

BEVERLY J. ANDERSON • BEVERLY POPELKA

By Department of Defense Directive 5124.7, former Secretary of Defense William Cohen formally established the Office of the Chancellor for Education and Professional Development, effective Sept. 27, 1999. Generally speaking, this Directive charges the Chancellor to be a partner of change with the Department of Defense education and professional community to ensure high-quality and cost-effective civilian education and professional development programs.

DoD Chancellor's Charge

The Chancellor's charge is directed toward DoD-conducted, -sponsored, -contracted, or -funded programs; curriculum; and institutions concerned with education or professional development of DoD civilians. Specifically, this general charge includes the following responsibilities:

- Development of DoD standards of academic quality and cost effectiveness.
- Review and evaluation of the curriculum, faculty hiring practices, academic operations, organizational structure, position management, and resource management.
- Review and evaluation of plans, programs, budgets, and performance of

DoD civilian education and professional development.

- Management of working groups of representatives from DoD institutions and programs to develop standards in concert with external accreditation and certification entities.

As a result of the November 1997 Defense Reform Initiative (DRI) report, which made specific recommendations for improving efficiency by adopting effective practices used in corporate businesses, the position of Chancellor was established. On Oct. 2, 1998, the Chancellor was appointed.

Metrics of Excellence Project

The Metrics of Excellence Project (MEP) is the name used to refer to all of the activities of the Office of the Chancellor in response to Department of Defense Directive 5124.7. It involves the organization and all of the processes leading to the high-quality and cost-effective civilian education and professional development under the purview of the Chancellor.

The project focused on the development of academic and resource standards and attendant metrics for DoD civilian institutions. These institutions have been created to respond to the education and training needs of approximately 700,000 individuals in the civilian workforce.

Throughout the process of academic standards and metrics development, the

Academic Programs Division worked closely with the Academic Quality Working Group (AQWG), the Steering Group, and their attendant peer groups in addressing the prescribed tasks and in building consensus on every major step in the process.

At the first meeting in January 2000, representatives designed a peer organizational structure for the MEP. This delineation by peer subgroups allowed for a means to compare like institutions; served as a resource for benchmarking and best practices sharing; assisted in executive decision making; fostered meaningful dialogue and consensus building; and maximized synergy among like/similar institutions.

The peer group organizational structure of the MEP also facilitated within-group input, which focused on ensuring accountability, raising academic standards, challenging faculty, inspiring students, and building a community among DoD civilian institutions. The group structure also provided an opportunity for the Office of the Chancellor to hear concerns of the respective peer groups and to avert any consequences that might adversely affect DoD institutions.

Chancellor's Philosophy

The Chancellor enumerated several beliefs and concerns that frame a philosophy of standards and metrics development. He asserted the importance of several initiatives:

Anderson is a Research Fellow with the Office of the DoD Chancellor for Education and Professional Development, Arlington, Va. Popelka is also with the Office of the DoD Chancellor for Education and Professional Development, and serves as Chief, Academic Programs Division.

- Obtaining maximum involvement from DoD civilian institutions throughout the duration of the MEP.
- Seeking a clear understanding of the connection between standards and metrics.
- Working collaboratively in the development of appropriate standards and ensuring that the standards meet the direction and guidance of the Department of Defense leadership.
- Helping institutions measure their progress.
- Linking measures to processes and outcomes.
- Ensuring that the measures are highly intuitive, self-administrable, and auditable.
- Identifying meaningful measures [for a standard] that reflect the heart of the matter and also the progress made at DoD civilian institutions, recognizing that no measures have yet been developed that assess outcomes in depth.

He also stated that assessment and accountability in education are paramount in today's world, and that efforts to improve DoD civilian education will be supported by DoD because of the senior leadership focus on Return on Investment.

Principles, Processes Pinpointed

Bearing in mind the beliefs and concerns expressed by the Chancellor, the activities of the Academic Programs Division in MEP were guided by the five following overarching principles and processes:

- Follow the guidance from the Chancellor and the Steering Group.
- Coordinate and converge activities with the Academic Quality Working Group.
- Ensure that the process is collegial, collaborative, iterative, and inclusive.
- Build consensus within and among the peer groups.
- Use a research paradigm and controls for internal validity and reliability.

Choosing a Model

In an effort to create and maintain a quality environment for Department of Defense civilian educational institutions, the Academic Programs Division used



The peer group organizational structure of the MEP also facilitated within-group input, which focused on ensuring accountability, raising academic standards, challenging faculty, inspiring students, and building a community among DoD civilian institutions.

an eclectic approach of current and innovative models for standards and metrics development. At the same time, the Division ensured that the quality standards developed were in concert with external accreditation and certification entities.

Banta Model

A modified version of the Banta Model was used in conjunction with aspects of the model used by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to develop standards, objectives, metrics, and ultimately, levels of quality.

The model advanced by Dr. Trudy Banta, Vice Chancellor for Planning and Institutional Improvement, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, is a comprehensive framework for standards and metrics development. This authoritative model provides insights on possible concerns of major stakeholders, as

well as salient questions that must be addressed in arriving at appropriate standards. The Banta model stresses four points:

- Importance of quality assessment in post secondary programs and professional development.
- Importance of an all-inclusive strategy for developing assessment tools that match the stated goals and objectives.
- Need for assessment to be continuous and not episodic.
- Importance of partnerships with major stakeholders, both internal and external, in assessment.

Baldrige Model

The process for developing the standards was also influenced by the Baldrige Model, five major models of regional and specialized accrediting bodies, and the expertise of the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, and representatives from DoD institutions. The Baldrige Model is a continuous self-improvement, data-driven, and outcomes-focused model that calls for maximum inclusion of all stakeholders and maximum interfacing of all processes. It stresses creation, maintenance, and accessibility of pertinent data and information and forces an institution to know and communicate to all stakeholders how major processes work and how they interface with one another.

CHEA Model

The CHEA model is an evidence-generated approach to institutional accreditation. It focuses on key learning processes and educational outcomes, and is designed to promote greater consistency and rigor in making judgments about institutional performance.

Several aspects of the CHEA accreditation model were most appealing to the AQWG, the peer groups, and staff; specifically, the focus on educational outcomes as well as the quality levels used for metrics. Several peer group members expressed that the quality-levels metrics could capture the essence of an institution's programs, curriculum, faculty and staff, and support services at the same time that they convey what is needed for an institution to advance to the next and

ultimately to the highest quality level. These quality levels as metrics are in stark contrast to the more inductive and traditional metrics often used to assess performance of institutions, programs, curriculum, faculty and staff, and student support services.

For MEP, the Banta Model provided a meaningful and useful process for developing standards and metrics; the Baldrige Model provided a meaningful and useful philosophy as DoD civilian post secondary institutions strive for excellence, and the CHEA model provided a concrete format for quality-based metrics. The quality levels in the CHEA model make clear what an institution must do to achieve the next quality level and ultimately become excellent in a given category.

Development of Standards

The process of developing world-class standards for curriculum, faculty, and student support services for DoD educational institutions was indeed collaborative and iterative. Bearing in mind the key elements of the Banta, Baldrige, and CHEA models and the concerns of the Chancellor, the Academic Programs Division prepared three baseline, six-column matrices of standards used by six accrediting bodies – the first, a matrix of curriculum standards; the second, one of faculty standards; and the third, a matrix of student support standards.

DoD Conference on Civilian Education and Professional Development

The Third DoD Conference on Civilian Education and Professional Development will be co-hosted by The Joint Military Intelligence College, Bolling AFB, June 26–27, 2001. Watch for more details of the conference on the DoD Chancellor's Web site at <http://www.chancellor.osd.mil>.

The Metrics of Excellence Project model will be validated and then presented as the DoD Model for high-quality civilian post secondary education and professional development.

The Academic Programs Division presented these matrices to the AQWG for their consideration in developing standards for DoD civilian post secondary institutions. Standards were presented from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), Council on Occupational Education (COE), Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training (ACCET), and Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS).

Upon review and further refinement of the three baseline sets of standards, the Steering Group approved 11 standards covering the academic quality areas of curriculum, faculty and staff, and students on June 28, 2000. Several iterations were developed before the final version was approved.

From Standards to Objectives and Metric Topics

Shortly after the 11 standards were approved by the Steering Group, two brainstorming sessions were held to discuss how to ensure the achievement of the standards and how to determine if indeed the standards are being met. Following these sessions, the staff proceeded to develop the first iteration of draft objectives and metric topics as a

baseline to present to the peer groups. Each peer group was presented with the same set of baseline objectives and metric topics to review, revise, and edit. They were charged to generate a set of objectives and metric topics for their respective institutions, programs, and curriculum.

The peer group on degree-granting institutions participated in a two-day workshop at the National Defense University July 25–26, 2000. The all-day discussions were rich with input from all members of the peer group, the Deputy Chancellor, and the staff. The draft objectives and metric topics attendant to the 11 standards were transformed into a derived version of objectives and metric topics.

Likewise, the other two peer groups met and were presented with the same draft objectives and metric topics as were presented to the degree-granting Peer Group two weeks earlier. The Job-Specific Peer Group met for a one-day session on Aug. 10, 2000. All of the Career Development (and International Group) Peer Group member institutions were represented at Fort Belvoir, Va., on Aug. 21, 2000, to complete the same task presented to the other groups.

Once again, the Deputy Chancellor was present, the discussions were lively, and the groups were focused on completing the task for the day in consensus-building sessions. By the end of each peer group session, a derived matrix of objectives and metric topics was developed for the respective peer groups in each of the academic quality areas: curriculum, faculty, and student support services.

At this point, all three peer groups had met and agreed upon a refined list of objectives and metric topics for each of the general topics: curriculum, faculty, and student support services. Now the challenge of the staff turned to preparing and presenting to the Steering Group at its Sept. 12, 2000, meeting (only three weeks away) a consolidated and integrated set of objectives and metric topics for each of the general topics. These matrices consisted of the final set of ob-

jectives and metric topics and the integrated or derived list of objectives and metric topics prepared by the staff.

On Sept. 12, 2000, the Metrics of Excellence Steering Group endorsed the process used to move from the standards to the derived objectives and metric topics for academic quality, and encouraged the staff to proceed with the final step in the metrics development process: the actual development of a measurement system. Notwithstanding, the Steering Group also expressed its desire to expand the standards, objectives, and metric topics for faculty to also include staff. The Chancellor's staff made the necessary changes, and noted that standards and attendant objectives and metric topics for academic quality now exist for curriculum, faculty and staff, and student support services.

Quality Levels as Metrics

The greatest challenge of the Academic Programs Division was the creation of metrics for the objectives and metric topics. Baseline quality levels were developed for each of the three major groups of standards — curriculum, faculty and staff, and student support services. In developing the draft quality levels for review by the AQWG, the staff once again used guiding principles that became the measurement philosophy for this project. Accordingly, the staff determined that measurement is all of the following:

- Self-Reflective
- Flexible
- Serious but not onerous
- Designed for improvement, but not proscriptive
- Reflects engagement and commitment.

The five quality levels were prepared for AQWG in each academic quality area as the first iteration or baseline metrics. These quality levels tended to focus on learning outcomes in the areas of curriculum and student support services, and addressed terms and conditions for faculty and staff. Other characteristics of the quality levels are that they accommodate traditional as well as distributed learning; they reduce institu-

tional burden; they promote consistency; and they allow for peer review and third-party audits.

Process and Product

The process of the Academic Programs Division on MEP that led to the development of standards, objectives, metrics, and levels of quality in three broad areas — curriculum, faculty and staff, and student support services — resulted in a much-needed product for use in enhancing and affirming the academic quality at DoD civilian post secondary institutions. The process and product were in response to the general charge to the Chancellor by former Secretary of Defense Cohen: The project, which addressed academic quality, was designed primarily to enhance the educational experiences and personal learning of students in these institutions by focusing on their meeting standards for curriculum, faculty and staff, and student support services.

Model Soon to be Validated

The model used in the MEP to ensure high-quality civilian post secondary education and professional development programs was based on key elements of the Banta, Baldrige, and CHEA Models. The 11 quality standards generated from this project are consistent with those of external accrediting bodies.

Additionally, the MEP model for institutional excellence is an all inclusive, self-improvement, and auditable model that stresses student outcomes, institutional processes, terms and conditions for faculty and staff, and stakeholder involvement in assessment. The Metrics of Excellence Project model will be validated and then presented as the DoD model for high-quality civilian post secondary education and professional development.

Editor's Note: The authors welcome questions or comments on this article. Contact Anderson at Andersbj@osd.pentagon.mil; contact Popelka at Popelkba@osd.pentagon.mil.

Fiscal 2000 Refined Packard Acquisition Workforce Count Now Online

The Department of Defense Key Acquisition and Technology Workforce Report for fiscal 2000 is now online at <http://www.acq.osd.mil/ar/#count>. The report provides an overview as well as summary data on the numbers of personnel serving in key positions throughout the acquisition and technology workforce for fiscal 2000. Based on Defense Manpower Data Center data, the fiscal 2000 workforce consisted of 135,014 civilian and military personnel as of Sept. 30, 2000.

The report is third in a series of reports initiated by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, and prepared by Jefferson Solutions (Solutions), a division of the Jefferson Consulting Group. Solutions' May 1999 and May 2000 reports sized the fiscal 1998 and 1999 workforces at 146,071 and 138,851, respectively.

COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS & SUPPORT SAVINGS INITIATIVE (COSSI)

The Commercial Operations and Support Savings Initiative (COSSI) is seeking innovative ideas for using commercial technologies to reduce the operations and support costs of legacy systems. For information on how to submit a proposal see: <http://www.acq.osd.mil/es/dut/cossi/FY02/Index.htm>.